

JOB

CHAPTERS 20 & 21

Introduction

Zophar and Job are at complete disagreement over the facts:

▶▶ Zophar observes that the life of the wicked is brief. In 20:4 & 5, Zophar says,

Job 20:4 "Do you not know this of old, Since man was placed on earth,
Job 20:5 That the triumphing of the wicked is short, And the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?"

But in 21:7, Job disagrees, saying,

Job 21:7 Why do the wicked live and become old, Yes, become mighty in power?

▶▶ Zophar observes that the pleasure of the wicked are fleeting. In 20:18, Zophar says,

Job 20:18 He will restore that for which he labored, And will not swallow it down; From the proceeds of business He will get no enjoyment.

But in 21:17, Job disagrees, saying,

Job 21:17 "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does their destruction come upon them, The sorrows God distributes in His anger?"

▶▶ Zophar observes that the death of the wicked is violent and painful. In 20:23, Zophar says,

Job 20:23 When he is about to fill his stomach, God will cast on him the fury of His wrath, And will rain it on him while he is eating.

But in 21:26, Job disagrees, saying,

Job 21:26 They lie down alike in the dust, And worms cover them.

Both men were setting forth their observations of life. Both were setting forth facts of life. One of them must be wrong! It was, of course, Zophar who was wrong.

Zophar was trying to prove that Job's sufferings were consistent with those of the wicked - - that his sufferings proved that he was wicked, and that he was getting what he deserved. Thus he forced the facts to fit.

Job knew - - as do we - - that he was suffering as a righteous man. Thus he faced the facts by faith.

You can be a Zophar when you are called upon to comfort someone in their suffering... Or you can be a Job when you are called upon to comfort someone in their suffering. It all depends upon what you do with the facts.

We'll see two things in our study:

#1 You'll Fail To Comfort When
You Force The Facts To Fit

#2 You'll Furnish Comfort When
You Face The Facts By Faith

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#1 You'll Fail To Comfort When
You Force The Facts To Fit
(Chapter 20)

"Don't confuse me with the facts" would be a good title for Zophar's message to Job. He and Job's two other friends were already convinced that only the wicked suffer. Therefore, he and Job's two other friends weren't interested in truly exploring Job's situation. They would force the facts to fit their preconceived theory. Thus, as Zophar argues with Job in chapter twenty, he must *ignore*, *invent*, and *inflate* the facts to force them to fit.

In the first eleven verses, Zophar ignores the facts:

Job 20:1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

Job 20:2 "Therefore my anxious thoughts make me answer, Because of the turmoil within me.

Job 20:3 I have heard the rebuke that reproaches me, And the spirit of my understanding causes me to answer.

Zophar was uptight, offended. He couched his words in spiritual sounding terms, but he was answering from anger. The end of verse two can be translated, “because I am of a hasty temperament.” Don’t disguise sin by blaming your temperament, by saying, “That’s just the way I am.”

Watch Zophar ignore the facts in verses four through eleven:

Job 20:4 "Do you not know this of old, Since man was placed on earth,

Job 20:5 "That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?.

Job 20:6 Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens, And his head reaches to the clouds,

Job 20:7 Yet he will perish forever like his own refuse; Those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'

Job 20:8 He will fly away like a dream, and not be found; Yes, he will be chased away like a vision of the night.

Job 20:9 The eye that saw him will see him no more, Nor will his place behold him anymore.

Job 20:10 His children will seek the favor of the poor, And his hands will restore his wealth.

Job 20:11 His bones are full of his youthful vigor, But it will lie down with him in the dust.

According to Zophar, the life of the wicked is brief. We know he’s talking about their physical life on the earth because of Job’s response in chapter twenty-one, where he contradicts Zophar by pointing out that many wicked people live on to a ripe, old age without much trouble along the way. Zophar is ignoring the facts in order to prove his theory.

Unbelievers frequently ignore the facts. I’m oversimplifying, but I’d say that the theory of evolution is a classic example - - maybe **the** classic example - - of unbelievers ignoring the facts. All you have to do is observe the world around you to know that there was, and is, a Creator.

But we’re not talking about the unbeliever; we’re talking about the *believer* who ignores the facts. You don’t mean to intend them, but you do tend to ignore them when you have a preconceived theory.

Don’t get me wrong: You *must* have preconceptions and prejudices as a believer. Just make sure that your preconceptions and prejudices are biblical. Otherwise you’ll ignore the facts.

A woman I visited in a mental hospital had attempted suicide. She was a believer attending a church that taught her she would be healthy and wealthy as long as she made positive confessions of faith. After a series of personal crises, when she was literally homeless and hurting, her church told her she must be in sin. Her suffering didn't fit with their preconceived theory of health and wealth, so they blamed her. They ignored the facts.

▶▶ You can also inflate facts:

Job 20:12 "Though evil is sweet in his mouth, And he hides it under his tongue,
Job 20:13 Though he spares it and does not forsake it, But still keeps it in his mouth,
Job 20:14 Yet his food in his stomach turns sour; It becomes cobra venom within him.
Job 20:15 He swallows down riches And vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly.
Job 20:16 He will suck the poison of cobras; The viper's tongue will slay him.
Job 20:17 He will not see the streams, The rivers flowing with honey and cream.
Job 20:18 He will restore that for which he labored, And will not swallow it down; From the proceeds of business He will get no enjoyment.
Job 20:19 For he has oppressed and forsaken the poor, He has violently seized a house which he did not build.

Using eating as an illustration, Zophar argues that the wicked don't enjoy pleasures for very long. Again Job will refute him, saying in chapter twenty-one

Job 21:17 "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does their destruction come upon them, The sorrows God distributes in His anger?"

The wicked often enjoy a long and pleasurable life on earth. Some do not; these are the ones Zophar is focusing on. Zophar is inflating facts to fit his theory.

Ever been in an argument? A lot of times you inflate facts in an argument. You use the words "Never" and "Always" to inflate and exaggerate your point. You won't be much comfort to sufferers if you inflate facts.

▶▶ You can also invent facts:

Job 20:20 "Because he knows no quietness in his heart, He will not save anything he desires.
Job 20:21 Nothing is left for him to eat; Therefore his well-being will not last.
Job 20:22 In his self-sufficiency he will be in distress; Every hand of misery will come against him.
Job 20:23 When he is about to fill his stomach, God will cast on him the fury of His wrath, And will rain it on him while he is eating.
Job 20:24 He will flee from the iron weapon; A bronze bow will pierce him through.

Job 20:25 It is drawn, and comes out of the body; Yes, the glittering point comes out of his gall. Terrors come upon him;

Job 20:26 Total darkness is reserved for his treasures. An unfanned fire will consume him; It shall go ill with him who is left in his tent.

Job 20:27 The heavens will reveal his iniquity, And the earth will rise up against him.

Job 20:28 The increase of his house will depart, And his goods will flow away in the day of His wrath.

Job 20:29 This is the portion from God for a wicked man, The heritage appointed to him by God."

Zophar argued that the death of the wicked is violent and painful; again, Job will point out that this is not always consistent with the facts. Zophar was inventing facts.

Psychology is famous for inventing facts. Consider, for example, all of the regression therapies - - that take you back to supposedly repressed memories from childhood or even from the womb. Many of them are not repressed memories; they are false memories - - invented by the therapist to fit his or her theory. When you invent facts, you fail to comfort.

"Don't confuse me with the facts!" It would be easy if everything fit neatly into our theories; it doesn't. Don't force the facts to fit your pet idea... Abandon the idea and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

#2 You'll Furnish Comfort When You Face The Facts By Faith (Chapter 21)

Job knew the facts; so do we. He was not suffering for his sin; he was suffering as a righteous man. But the fact remained that he was suffering. He faced the fact by faith, and here is how he did so: He believed that prosperity is spiritual, he believed that patience is saintly, and he believed that providence is sovereign.

►► Prosperity is spiritual:

Job 21:1 Then Job answered and said:

Job 21:2 "Listen carefully to my speech, And let this be your consolation.

Job 21:3 Bear with me that I may speak, And after I have spoken, keep mocking.

Job 21:4 "As for me, is my complaint against man? And if it were, why should I not be impatient?

Job 21:5 Look at me and be astonished; Put your hand over your mouth.

Job 21:6 Even when I remember I am terrified, And trembling takes hold of my flesh.

When Job said, “Listen... and let this be your consolation,” he meant that they would have been more of a comfort to him had they simply listened and not spoken. He was complaining to God, and didn't need their advice - - only their understanding.

Job begins to talk about the prosperity of the wicked in verse seven:

Job 21:7 Why do the wicked live and become old, Yes, become mighty in power?
Job 21:8 Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring before their eyes.
Job 21:9 Their houses are safe from fear, Neither is the rod of God upon them.
Job 21:10 Their bull breeds without failure; Their cow calves without miscarriage.
Job 21:11 They send forth their little ones like a flock, And their children dance.
Job 21:12 They sing to the tambourine and harp, And rejoice to the sound of the flute.
Job 21:13 They spend their days in wealth, And in a moment go down to the grave.
Job 21:14 Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.
Job 21:15 Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?'

The wicked, Job points out, seem better off than the righteous! And, as a matter of fact, they often are better off - - in a material sense. It's a fact Job is willing to face - - but he does so by faith, as you read in verse sixteen,

Job 21:16 Indeed their prosperity is not in their hand; The counsel of the wicked is far from me.

Even though God seems to be prospering them, Job will not identify with them. By faith he sees that true prosperity is spiritual. The only heaven an unbeliever will ever know is his or her material prosperity on earth; let them have it! Job is looking beyond, by faith, to the spiritual prosperity of eternity. True prosperity is spiritual.

►► Patience is saintly:

Job 21:17 "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does their destruction come upon them, The sorrows God distributes in His anger?
Job 21:18 They are like straw before the wind, And like chaff that a storm carries away.
Job 21:19 They say, 'God lays up one's iniquity for his children'; Let Him recompense him, that he may know it.
Job 21:20 Let his eyes see his destruction, And let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.
Job 21:21 For what does he care about his household after him, When the number of his months is cut in half?

Verse eighteen implies the “how often” clause of verse seventeen; “how often are they like straw before the wind... how often are they like chaff that a storm carries away.” In other words,

the wicked don't often experience calamity - - or at least not any more than the righteous. The talk about their children is an argument that, even if they don't experience calamity themselves, their children will. Not only is that not true, it's a stupid argument, since the wicked man won't know anything about the calamities befalling his children after he is dead!

Why doesn't God send more calamity upon the wicked? The Apostle Peter says that it is because God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to eternal life. By faith Job could remain patient though he suffered and the wicked did not - - knowing God was being patient with them for an important spiritual reason.

►► Providence is sovereign:

Job 21:22 "Can anyone teach God knowledge, Since He judges those on high?

Job 21:23 One dies in his full strength, Being wholly at ease and secure;

Job 21:24 His pails are full of milk, And the marrow of his bones is moist.

Job 21:25 Another man dies in the bitterness of his soul, Never having eaten with pleasure.

Job 21:26 They lie down alike in the dust, And worms cover them."

In effect Job says "Can you tell God how to govern His world? Can you tell Him He must only afflict the godless and only bless the godly?" Job has God's providence in view. He causes the rain to fall on the just and on the unjust; His mercies generally extend to all mankind. By faith Job accepts God's providence for each life as sovereign - - as being perfect for each person. What seems unfair is not if we only knew all the facts. In the mean time we trust that God's providence is sovereign - - even if it includes the suffering of the righteous.

Job is willing to face the facts - - not ignore, or inflate, or invent them. His faith makes the difference.

In the closing verses, Job points out to his friends that they are inconsistent:

Job 21:27 "Look, I know your thoughts, And the schemes with which you would wrong me.

Job 21:28 For you say, 'Where is the house of the prince? And where is the tent, The dwelling place of the wicked?'

Job's friends were seeking to prove that Job was wicked; it was their theory, regardless the true facts. The very fact that Job was suffering was proof enough for them of Job's wickedness.

Job 21:29 Have you not asked those who travel the road? And do you not know their signs?

Here Job is saying that everyone who has any experience can tell you that the wicked don't always suffer, and that the righteous sometimes do suffer.

Job 21:30 For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.

Job 21:31 Who condemns his way to his face? And who repays him for what he has done?

Job 21:32 Yet he shall be brought to the grave, And a vigil kept over the tomb.

Job 21:33 The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him; Everyone shall follow him, As countless have gone before him.

Job 21:34 How then can you comfort me with empty words, Since falsehood remains in your answers?"

The way Job sees it, the wicked "are reserved for the day of doom" - - meaning they are spared from suffering; and they are "brought out on the day of wrath" - - meaning they are removed from harm. They go through life without rebuke; and at their death, many attend their funeral and honor them.

While this is an exaggeration, Job's point is that the words of his three friends are empty and false since they do not account for all the facts.

It's better - - it's essential - - to face the facts by faith.

Conclusion

We are a people who walk by faith, not by sight. God sometimes seems to hide Himself; but He never absents Himself. We're sometimes in the dark - - but He's never at a distance.

You are asked, and will be asked, to face the facts by faith. Believe that prosperity is spiritual... Believe that patience is saintly... and Believe that providence is sovereign.